

**TESTIMONY OF JASON PELLETIER
MARCH 11, 2010
APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE
RE: HARDOUS DUTY WORKERS' COMP**

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Good afternoon Chairman Harp, Chairman Geragosian and members of the Appropriations Committee. I am Jason Pelletier. I am a juvenile detention officer with 13 years of public service to the state of Connecticut. I work at the Hartford Juvenile Detention Center. I am also a union steward for AFSCME Local 749.

I am here to speak in opposition to Governor Rell's attempt to eliminate hazardous duty workers' compensation for juvenile detention officers and other law enforcement and hazardous duty employees.

Public servants, who are eligible for hazardous duty workers' compensation benefits can only receive it if they are put out of work through a "line of duty" injury. In the case of juvenile detention officers, we are the first responders to emergency situations.

We constantly find ourselves in volatile situations, whether it be mediating between juveniles, breaking up fights or dealing with mentally unstable and dangerous offenders. And, as of this year, we have been given the responsibility of dealing with 16-year-old violent offenders without further training.

Last fall I injured my shoulder breaking up a violent altercation involving two juveniles that resulted in me being out of work on workers' comp and needing surgery to repair my shoulder. I am now left with pain and discomfort.

We all understand the risks associated with our career choices. But I believe that I speak for everyone possibly affected by eliminating hazardous duty workers compensation when I say that this would undermine public safety. It would send a terrible message to employees and the public we serve.

JDOs and other frontline workers at the Hartford, New Haven and Bridgeport Centers, as well as the Central Transportation Unit, are already understaffed. Many of us are working mandatory 16-hour shifts or voluntary overtime shifts, which puts further strain on us and the kids we're supposed to protect. We've seen an increase in workplace injuries, workers' compensation claims. Destroying the hazardous duty benefit -- and potentially our livelihoods -- is not going to make juvenile offenders any more safe and secure.

Thank you very much for listening to our concerns. I'd be happy to answer any questions.